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An account
of an
Epidemic Fever,



as it appeared in Adams County in 1823;
being an

Inaugural Dissertation
for the

Degree of Doctor of Medicine.
by

Passed March 24
1826

Alexander Speer
of
Pennsylvania

W. S. H

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Introduction

The general importance attached to every epidemic, the extensive ravages committed by the one which has so recently pervaded our country and particularly the universal dominion it attained and exerted over Gettysburg and its vicinity, during the last three years whilst I was a student of Medicine, claims a right to my inaugural essay. I pretend not to enlarge the bounds of medical science or shed new light on the paths of philosophical inquiry, by developing its causes, displaying any new laws or proclaiming any specific method of treatment, nor shall I even attempt the more humble task of recording its history from its inception as a simple intermittent in 1821, nor trace its varying forms through continued, remittent and dysenteric in 1822, but be confined to the observations I was enabled to make during the last year. I will however premise, that its localities were the same in each year, that is,

Introduction

The present volume contains a collection of papers
which have been published in the
course of the last few years, and which
are intended to illustrate the history of the
United States, from the first settlement
of the country to the present time. The
papers are arranged in chronological order,
and are divided into two parts, the first
containing the history of the country from
the first settlement to the year 1776, and
the second containing the history from 1776
to the present time. The first part is
divided into three sections, the first
containing the history of the country from
the first settlement to the year 1700, the
second containing the history from 1700 to
1776, and the third containing the history
from 1776 to the present time. The second
part is divided into two sections, the first
containing the history of the country from
1776 to the year 1800, and the second
containing the history from 1800 to the
present time. The papers are written in a
clear and concise style, and are intended
to be read by the general public.

the particular districts of country in which it
appears the first year were its theatre in all,
and those situations which were exempt the
first season, were equally fortunate in the suc-
ceeding ones with the exception of one, which,
although severely suffering during the winter,
was wholly exempt during the warmer months.

[Faint, illegible handwriting visible through the paper, likely from the reverse side.]

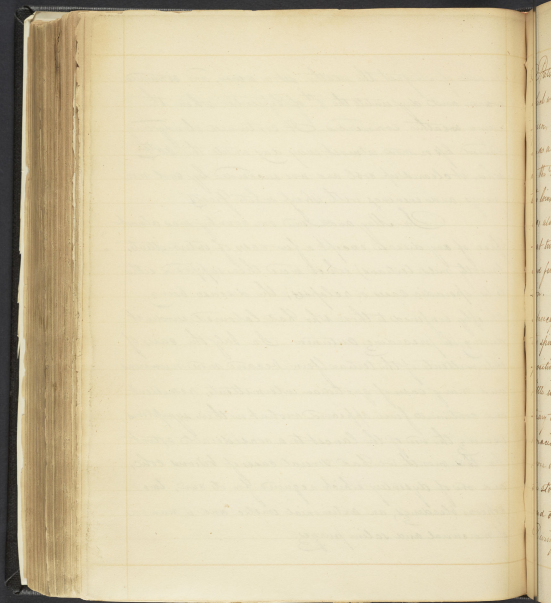
An account &c.

The weather during the months of April and May was very cool with the exception of a few warm days. A great quantity of rain fell out during these months, owing to which, and to the coldness of the weather the farmers were unusually late in getting in their spring crops. Frosts were also very common, inasmuch that fruit of almost every description failed. In June and July the weather became more moderate and pleasant. There were also considerable quantities of rain during these months, frequent showers alternated by warm sunshine. This was what is popularly termed very "reasonable" weather, promising to agriculturists the most abundant crops. No wise they disappointed in their expectations; vegetation of every kind flourished most luxuriantly. During this time we had some thunderstorms in which the lightning was remarkably vivid, followed in quick succession by most tremendous peals of thunder. About the

Mr. account - Vol

Middle of August the weather set in warm, and continued warm and dry until the 8th of September when the rainy weather commenced. It continued cloudy and rained less or more almost every day until the 20th when it cleared up cool and was succeeded by cool mornings and evenings with sharp white frosts.

In May and June our country was almost free of any disease except a few cases of intermittents, (mostly mild tertians) which were then supposed either to be sporadic cases or relapses; the disease being chiefly confined to those who had laboured under it during the preceding autumn. In July the cases of intermittents of the tertian form became more numerous and many cases of quotidian intermittents, remittent and continued fever appeared violent in their symptoms bearing the use of the lancet to a considerable extent. In this month we had several cases of bilious colic, and one of dysentery which required for its cure, two copious bleedings, an antimonial emetic and a number of mercurial and saline purges.



Patients, mostly, for two or three days previous to the chill which was succeeded by the fever complained of great languor, lassitude and soreness of the bones with anorexia and a dull heavy pain in the head. In others the pain in the head was more acute accompanied with pain in the loins and an obtuse pain in the eyeballs, so much that it was almost impossible for them to look to either side without turning the whole head. In other cases the chill and fever was ushered in without any previous indisposition. In some, the chill was so slight as to be almost imperceptible; they experienced a sensation of coldness along the spine and in the extremities. A few during the indisposition previous to the attack of fever experienced very little inconvenience from gastric distress, but on the contrary the appetite remained unimpaired and even more voracious than natural. In such, the disease was always more obstinate and difficult of cure than those in which the stomach did not call for an impletion of animal and other strong foods.

During the chill they were generally affected with nausea

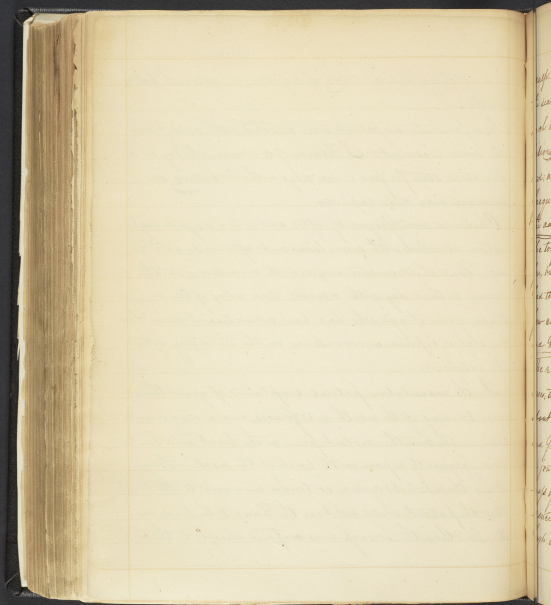
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or a retching and vomiting of a yellow or greenish bilious matter.

In a few instances patients were attacked with coma from the commencement. I heard of a woman who lay in a comatose state for five or six days without calling on medical aids and expired.

Children were frequently after one or two days indisposition, attacked with convulsions and afterwards with fever. Some children were seized with convulsions on the second or third day of the disease; and a boy of ten or twelve years of age who had been convalescent and had a relapse, expired in convulsions on the third day after the relapse.

In the exacerbatation patients complained of great thirst and burning of the mouth and fauces, and a disagreeable taste in the mouth; violent pain in the back and limbs and frequently a pain in the back of the neck. Sometimes the whole body was so tender and sore to the touch that the patient could not bear the hand to be laid on it. In others the soreness was confined chiefly to the



scalp. The pain in some, especially in the latter part of the season was principally seated in the intestines; in such every paroxysm appeared to be that of violent bilious colic. The face was flushed and the eyes red; and sometimes from the commencement, but frequently from the third or fourth day of the disease, the adnata of the eye was tinged with a yellow colour. The tongue in some cases was thickly covered with a white fur, but generally with a yellow scurf and again it had the appearance of being blackened with ink. In a few cases the tongue was clean and of a bright red colour and had a granulated sparkling appearance.

The respiration was hurried and laboured, with, in many cases, the sensation of a great weight and oppression about the precordia. The skin was dry, hard and parched, and frequently tinged with bile, especially about the third or fourth day of the disease. In some cases the yellowness of the skin continued for some days after convalescence took place. The urine was sparingly voided and high coloured. The bowels were generally bound, but

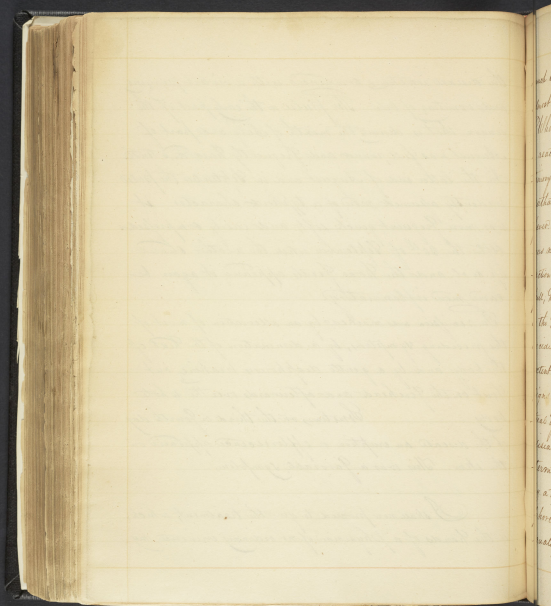
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the disease sometimes commenced with a violent purging
and vomiting of bile. The Pulse in the early part of the
season, that is, during the month of July and part of
August was full, round and frequently hard and tense.
In the latter end of August and in September the pulse
evidently assumed more of a typhoid character - it
was more frequent, quick, soft, and easily compressed.
After the 20th of September when the weather changed
up cool and the Hoar Frosts appeared it again be-
came more inflammatory.

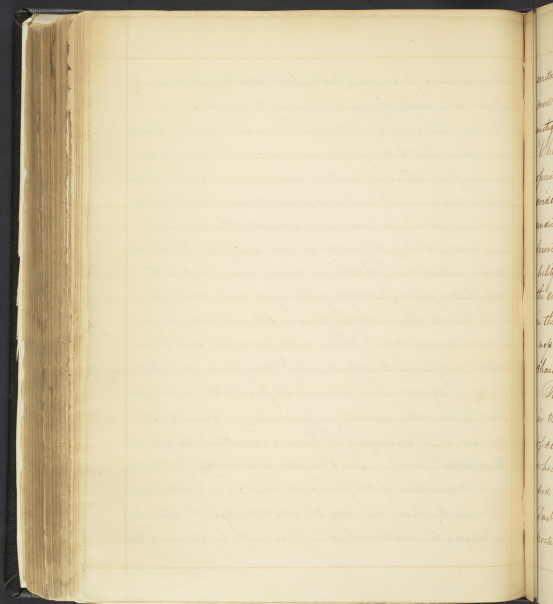
The remission was marked by an alleviation of most of
the preceding symptoms, by a diminution of the heat of
the body and by a gentle diaphoresis breaking out
first on the forehead and afterwards over the whole
body. Sometimes on the third or fourth day
of the disease an eruption or efflorescence appeared on
the skin. This was a favorable symptom.

I shall now proceed to give the treatment, which,
in the hands of a physician of no ordinary eminence, my



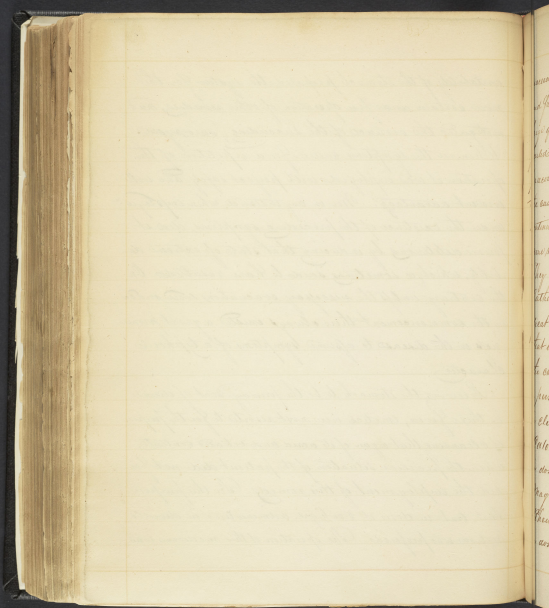
much esteemed preceptor, Doctor James H. Miller, proved in almost every case effectual in curing the disease.

When caladon before the disease was completely formed or reaction had taken place, an emetic of Tartarized Antimony promptly administered and followed by an active cathartic, in most instances prevented an attack of the fever. But if, as was most generally the case, aid was not solicited before the disease was formed and reaction established, if the excitement was great with full, hard pulse, redness of the eye, and severe pain in the head, blood letting was employed with the most decided advantage. When used promptly and to an extent sufficient to afford relief from pain or untill signs of syncope were induced, it proved the most effectual of any other remedy in producing a crisis to the disease, or in changing it from a remittent to an intermittent form. The operation was mostly followed by a termination of the paroxysm and by a gentle diaphoresis breaking out over the whole body. It also by equalizing the excitement, and frequently by allaying the



irritability of the stomach prepared the system for the more certain and free operation of other remedies, and mitigated the violence of the succeeding paroxysm. Whenever the symptoms called for a repetition of the operation it was employed with perfect safety and with evident advantage. Nor in any instance when employed, ^{without} the existence of the preceding symptoms, did it prove deleterious by inducing that state of extreme debility, which is sometimes said to have resulted. On the contrary, unless the necessary evacuations were made in the commencement there always existed a great propensity in the disease to assume symptoms of a typhoid character.

Relieving the stomach to be the primary seat of disease in these fevers, emetics were most resorted to for the purpose of cleansing that organ of its acrid and vitiated contents, when the peculiar situation of the patient did not forbid the employment of this remedy. For this purpose Tart. Ant. in doses of 5 or 6 grs. administered in divided portions was preferred. The operation of this medicine was



succeeded by an alleviation of suffering, a gentle diaphoresis,
and frequently a tranquil sleep. It always brought away
large quantities of acrid bilious matter and hardly ever
failed to relieve nausea, and that oppression about the
præcordia and difficulty of breathing which is frequently
the cause of so much alarm to patients. If these symptoms
continued after the operation of one dose a repetition of the
same medicine was prescribed with evident advantage.
They also prepared the stomach for the reception of
Cathartics, the next class of remedies employed. A
great variety of articles of this class was employed, but
that which proved the most efficacious in breaking up
the chain of morbid action in the system, in making
a permanent impression on the alimentary canal and
in cleansing it of its acrid and vitiated contents, was
Calomel. This medicine was either administered alone
in doses of from 10 to 20 grs. and followed by Sulphas
Mag. Sol. Fer. or Ol. Ric. or in combination ^{with} Salap.
Rhubarb, Colocyntb or Gamboz. Calomel & Salap,
in doses of from grs. X to XV of the former and gr. XV to XXX of

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the latter was very frequently advantageously employed. But sometimes, owing to the irritability of the stomach and the bulk of the medicine it was rejected. Here, calomel alone was more beneficially employed, being more easily retained by the stomach. It was also sometimes given in doses of two or three grains repeated every two or three hours. Given in this manner it hardly ever failed completely to evacuate the bowels and bring away black tarry stools which were mostly the forerunners of convalescence. Indeed in most instances convalescence was not produced until such evacuations were procured. This plan was pursued for two, three or four days, or until the bowels appeared to be cleansed of their vitiated contents, when Cal. Eps. Sol. Iod. & Crem. Tart. a Magnesia was substituted. In some cases in which symptoms assumed rather a typhoid character, in which great irritability of stomach existed and in which it was difficult to get medicines to have their specific effects the following following possessed the therapeutic property of allaying irritability, producing a moderate diaphoresis

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and keeping the bowels in a soluble condition. R Calomel gr.ij,
Camphor gr.ii, Opium gr.ij, M-ft pill. Noij Una Cap. omni
hora. Also in low states of the system when the pulse was
feeble, with dark, furred and dry tongue, by administer-
ing Calomel in combination with Camphor the system
was invigorated by one while the specific effects of the
other was obtained. In a few cases a ptyalism followed
the exhibition of Calomel. When this occurred little
inconvenience was experienced except that of a sore
mouth.

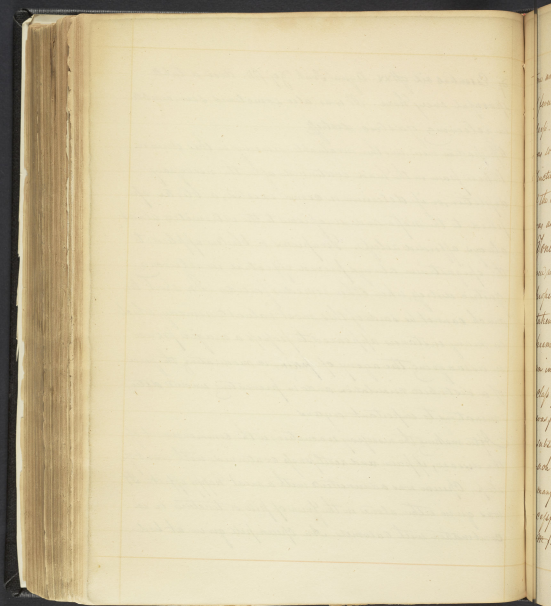
After evacuating the alimentary canal
of its contents Diaphoretics were next resorted to. If
arterial excitement continued the most effectual was
Nit. Potash & Tart. Ant. combined, thus. Nit Pot of Tart ant
gr.ij. Aqua B^j done a table spoonful every hour. Various
other diaphoretics were beneficially employed as Tart. ant.
alone, Nitrous powder, Gt. Mindereri &c. Sulfentaria
combined with Senna answered a good purpose in keeping
up a moderate perspiration and also in keeping the bowels
in a soluble condition. The following, when the symptoms
were of a typhoid nature was exhibited R Carb. Ammon.

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ʒj Essentia oil of xx Aqua Ant. ʒij At close a table
spoonful every hour. It was also sometimes serviceable
in relieving gastric distress

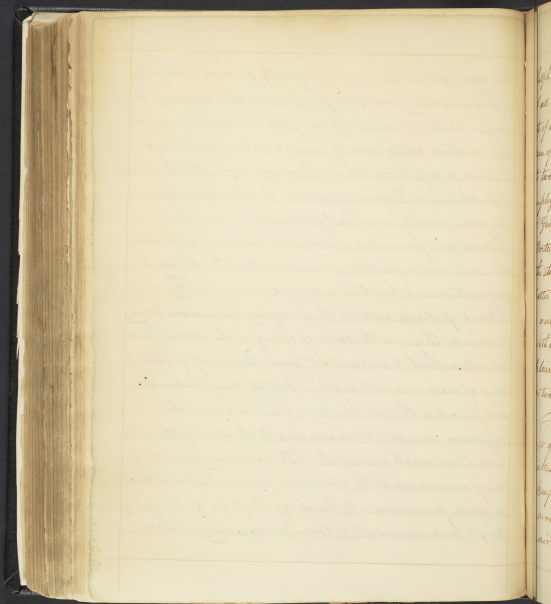
Epispastics were another invaluable remedy in this disease.
When pain in the head continued after the necessary
depletion, or if delirium or coma existed, a blister ap-
plied to the nape and sinapisms to the extremities almost
always afforded relief. Sinapisms or blisters applied to
the epigastrium always proved effectual in relieving
gastric distress, when other remedies failed. In short, too
much cannot be said of this most valuable remedy, which
in many instances appeared to possess a magic power
in assuaging the agony of pain, in moderating the force
of a disturbed circulation and in preventing undue deter-
minations to important organs

After making the necessary evacuations in the commencement of
the disease, if pain and restlessness continued with want of
sleep, Opium was administered with a most happy effect. It
was given either alone in the form of pill or tincture or in
combination with calomel. An opium pill given at bed



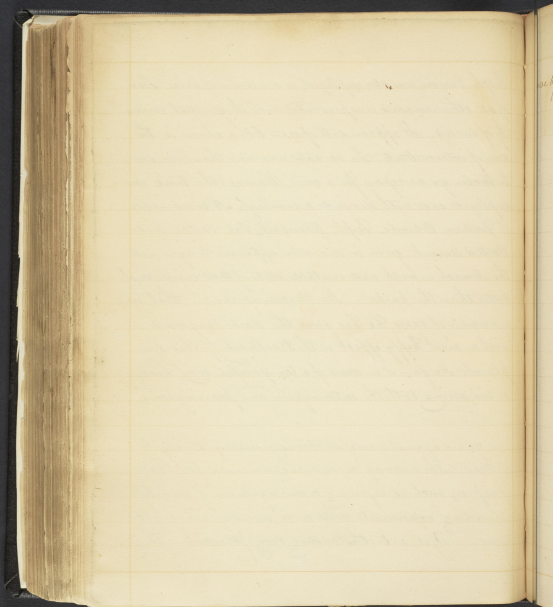
time and repeated if necessary frequently procured a remission of fever by exciting a moderate perspiration and disposing to sleep. In the intermittent forms of this disease the paroxysm was sometimes anticipated by from XX to XL drops of the Aromatic Tincture or gr. ℥ to ʒ of Opium. It always moderated the violence of the chill and frequently prevented it. Morbid vigilance was also generally relieved by Opium.

Emetics were prescribed as soon as the necessary evacuations were made and a complete intermission obtained. It may be proper to remark here that in many cases in which they were taken by patients without the necessary evacuations being procured they were the cause of changing the disease from an intermittent to a remittent form. A variety of this class of medicines were employed, but the chief reliance was placed in the Cort. Peruv. This was given either in substance, decoction &c, according to the state of the stomach which was to receive it. The following Formula in many cases in which the bark alone proved inert was successfully prescribed ℞ Cinch. ʒj. Ferpt. ʒa. ʒj. Sac. Tart. ʒj. M. ft. pulv. nov. one to be taken 3 or 4 times a day. The



Sulph. Quinine was also employed in a number of cases. This of all other remedies was prescribed with the greatest certainty of success. It appeared to operate like a charm in the cure of intermittents. In no case was more than from six to twelve grs necessary for a cure. Various other tonics were employed and with decided advantage. A combination of Gentian, Colombo, Sulph. Rheiubarb, Sal Tartar and Cortex Aurant. given in decoction appeared to agree with the stomach in weak and irritable states of that organ much better than the barks. Dr. Miller informs me that in a number of cases he has given the Carb. Magnesia with a most happy effect in the treatment of this complaint. He gave it in doses of a tea spoonful every hour or two, during both the intermission and paroxysm.

To guard against a relapse, it was necessary strictly to attend to the ordinary means recommended for that purpose, such as enjoining a due regulation of diet and avoiding exposure to cold and moisture and night-air. Yet notwithstanding every precaution they



were by no means uncommon

